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## THE TEACHING OF ECONOMICS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS<sup>1</sup>

THE designation, "People's College," gives expression to the fundamental purpose of the high school. Its primary function is training for citizenship. It only secondarily prepares young men and women for college. Insistence upon this idea entails a necessity for modification and betterment of high-school courses in several directions.

I have not the opportunity even to suggest ways in which the courses should be generally modified in order to meet the purpose for which these schools were established. This paper will be confined to the advocacy of a more extended and rational teaching of economics as an essential part of the high-school curriculum.

That the subject has been seriously neglected in the high schools of the country is shown by the fact that political economy is taught in only about one-twentieth of the schools that reported to the Committee of Ten, and that many schools which earlier included the study in their courses have found it unsatisfactory and have abandoned it. We seek naturally a reason for the neglect of a subject so essential to complete civic training. We find that the majority of those who teach it have no conception of its vital character, have had no training themselves in economic thinking, and are obliged therefore to limit the instruction to routine work with a text-book, assigning a daily stint of wearisome definitions and principles which convey no impression of the thoroughly practical character of the study. Is it any wonder that the subject is so often considered dry and uninteresting, and is it surprising that its principles are thought to be beyond the reach of high-school students?

The study must be made more practical, more real, more

<sup>1</sup> Paper read before the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club.

human. The most serious obstacle to the immediate realization of any plans for improvement is the lack of suitable instructors, and, to be sure, were this obstacle removed there would be no necessity for this paper at all. Were the high schools in possession of well-equipped teachers, trained in habits of sound economic thinking, we could safely leave it to individual instructors to work out the problem in their own way. But with the teaching force in the majority of the high schools seriously inadequate, we cannot expect for many years to come that a study introduced into the high-school curriculum within recent years, the importance of which is not yet appreciated, shall secure special teachers for its work. As long as the impression prevails among the body of our citizens that a knowledge of economic principles and problems and sound reasoning upon them come by intuition, not by study, just so long must we expect to have the subject taught by persons with little training and with but a faint conception of the importance of their task.

A second obstacle less serious in character is the lack of proper guides to rational methods of teaching. Books of some sort are desirable, but the text-book plan is objectionable, if by a text-book is meant a formal systematic treatise upon the whole subject of political economy. The strongest argument against the text-book plan is that it has not stood the test of practical experience. In the nature of the case a text-book of a size convenient for high school use can contain nothing but the barest statement of definitions and principles, and unless life is infused into these principles by the teacher, the work is without result. The teacher accomplishes nothing unless he shakes himself free from the restraints of the text-book and makes the subject live by bringing it into relation with everyday affairs. A guide to the teacher, and reference books of various kinds are valuable, but, in the absence of these, many books should be employed in class exercises rather than one. The high-school library plan which has proved so successful in many lines is the one to be adopted here.

The suggestion that formal text-books in political economy be abandoned prepares the way for the statement that teachers must not expect to present the science of political economy as a completed whole to the high-school student. He must content himself with instruction in fundamental principles. He cannot hope to present economic questions in all their intricacies and complications. It is hardly to be expected that the young minds can grasp the more intricate problems, can make all modifications and concessions necessary to accuracy of statement in describing the working of economic forces. They can grasp, however, the simpler problems, and obtain valuable training from their consideration if the subject-matter is presented in a way that is interesting and stimulating.

We come then to consider the question of method. It is my feeling and experience that better results can be obtained through the teaching of more economic history and less economic theory. For a definition of economic history I am under obligations to Professor Ashley of Harvard University, who says: "Economic history asks what has been the material basis of social existence; how have the necessities and conveniences of human life been produced; by what organization has labor been provided and directed; how have the commodities thus produced been distributed; what have been the institutions resting on this direction and distribution; what changes have taken place in the methods of agriculture, of industry, of trade; can any intelligible development be traced; and if so, has it been from worse to better?"

The value of historical training in general is so well recognized that it hardly needs defense in this connection. Its application to economics has met with more or less opposition, but an opposition which has been on the whole weak and illogical. Students must be made above all things to realize that economic conclusions are relative to given conditions; that they possess, therefore, only a hypothetical validity. They must be impressed with the fact that the problems upon which we, as citizens, are now engaged did not spring up suddenly out of nothing, but

that they represent a stage in economic development ; that they are an outgrowth of past conditions and past problems. They must be taught the proper point of view. They must learn to apply to all phenomena the principle of perspective, and give to every fact its proper place and its just proportion. They cannot be taught properly to appreciate the present great struggle between capital and labor until they have learned something of the way in which private property came into existence, and of the method by which the laborer was stripped of everything except property in himself, as a result of the great inventions and of the industrial revolution of the last century.

Why then study industrial history? Because in the first place the study of the origin and growth of industrial society develops in the student discriminating judgment, broadens his point of view, and enlarges his sympathies. In the second place, industrial history is intimately bound up with present day problems. History is filled with the struggles of economic forces. One ideal has triumphed, another has met defeat. We have the practical illustration of the working of an economic force. Perhaps it is a warning. A fact, an event in history is often a more convincing argument than a book full of theories. In the third place, economic history can be studied systematically and logically. It is complete in itself, and furnishes the student with something which is tangible and capable of being practically applied. He is studying the forces that are touching and influencing his everyday life.

Such a course should consist mainly in a study of English economic history as a basis for the investigation of our own development. It should include a study of primitive industrial conditions in England before the Norman Conquest, followed by a consideration of the manorial system, the growth of towns, the development of a national economic life, the evolution of commerce, the economic misdeeds of Henry VIII, and the economic changes of the sixteenth century, problems of money, poor relief and the like ; a history of the changes in methods of agriculture, the great inventions and the industrial revolution of

the last century, the factory acts, the history of trade unionism, and the various problems that have troubled English statesmen during the present century. This should be followed by a consideration of the economic history of our own country in its various phases.

I recognize that the teaching of economic history in advance of economic theory is asserted by many to be criminal pedagogics. Without entering into a discussion of this much-mooted, but far from settled question, it is sufficient here to say that the proposed study of economic history does not contemplate an abandonment of the study of theory, but rather a combined study of the two, the history to be illustrative of the theory, the theory to be evolved from the history. The history, then, should be so handled as at the same time to instruct the students in the important doctrines of the science. I feel confident that students will become more genuinely interested in the subject, and will grasp the principles more readily when they are illustrated by the history at every step. Beginning with economic conditions under the manorial system, and tracing the history through the development of markets and fairs to the appearance of towns and the evolution of a national economic life, the student learns naturally the principles of exchange; the transformation from a system of barter to a money economy; he observes how this exchange system becomes steadily more complicated, and he comes finally to a consideration of the principles underlying international trade. The history of the great Italian banking houses, the Bank of Amsterdam, and the Bank of England gives him an insight into the functions of a bank and the principles underlying the banking system; he compares them with modern banks and their methods. The debasement of the coinage by Henry VIII and other monarchs, the influx of the precious metals into England after the discovery of America present to him in simple form the problem of prices; he has practical illustration of the working of Gresham's law. With the industrial revolution of the last century, he gains an appreciation of the function and power

of capital, of the natural way in which our labor problem has arisen. He sees the meaning of improper distribution, which forms the burden of the socialistic argument against capital.

In the economic history of our own country, the student again finds fundamental economic principles in practical operation. A study of our tariff history gives opportunity to investigate the laws of value, the conditions of production, international trade. The development of the transportation industry illustrates the use of capital, the forms of its organization, and the effect of the corporate organization of industry upon the general question of distribution. We have an abundance of banking and monetary history to assist in the study of the principles of banking and exchange and a sufficiently diversified governmental policy to furnish plenty of data for the study of public finance in all its phases.

This plan is suggested to such high schools as are now giving courses in formal political economy, and is intended as a substitute for such courses.

For those schools which are at present teaching no economics whatever, I would urge a greater attention to economic history in connection with instruction in political history, especially of England and the United States.

It is utterly wrong to treat history as though it were nothing but past politics and to teach political history to the exclusion of other and perhaps more important phases. In a general study of English or American history that phase of the subject in a particular period should receive the most careful treatment which influences most widely the life and development of the people of that period. At one time, it may be the purely political phase; at another, the constitutional; at another, the industrial. The consideration of one phase assists the student to an understanding of other phases, and the study of history will yield the best results only when the various phases of a people's life and progress are given each their proper proportion of attention. A statement of the causes of the Hundred Years' War between France and England, for example, is not complete

unless we take into account the commercial relations which existed at the time between England and Flanders. Wat Tyler's rebellion of 1381 is without significance unless we make a careful study of the life of the peasant class and of the inroads made upon them by the Black Death. The industrial phase of the Tudor period demands careful attention. It is of the utmost importance in the history of the growth of the English people and is a prerequisite to a comprehension of the constitutional changes of the seventeenth century. Again, in the history of the United States, the same principle holds true. One phase of the subject serves to elucidate another. We obtain, for example, an utterly erroneous conception of the slavery question and of the attitude which the southern states assumed if we do not consider the industrial condition of the southern states and the part which slavery played in their entire economic organization.

Such a plan of correlation has been followed by many high-school teachers, and has been found entirely practicable. If consistently followed, it will give the student some insight into economic principles and some conception of the bearing of economic problems.

Having in mind the general plan which I have outlined, I sent circulars some weeks ago to the leading high schools of the northwest and propounded the following questions :

1. Is political economy taught in your high school?
2. If so, what is your opinion concerning a change to industrial history?
3. How would you correlate the work with that in history and civics?
4. If political economy is not taught in your high school, would you favor work in industrial history in connection with that in English and American history, and to what extent?

I am in receipt of sixty-three replies from high schools in Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, and Colorado. Political economy is taught as a separate subject in forty of these schools. Thirty-three schools from more or less of a change to industrial history; fifteen are



opposed to such a change. Ten schools are now teaching industrial history to a greater or less extent. The schools are practically unanimous in favor of correlating work in industrial history with that in the political history of England and the United States. But two replies were received vigorously defending the teaching of formal political economy in the high school, and these replies were from men who have had special training in economics and who are perhaps justified in making the attempt to teach to a limited number of advanced students the science of political economy as a whole.

This investigation coincides in its results with that instituted by the Committee of Ten and leads inevitably to the same conclusion. The impression with which I began the investigation has become a conviction that under present conditions the formal teaching of political economy in the high schools should be abandoned and I propose as a substitute the plan already presented to you. I have not had it in mind to lay down a definite plan of study, but merely to suggest an outline to be worked out in detail by each instructor with such modifications as seem necessary to meet local conditions and requirements.

Let me add just a word in answer to objections that have been raised. Says one correspondent, "The introduction of a course in industrial history will add one more subject to the already overcrowded high-school course." I desire to call your attention to the fact that this plan does not demand one moment of additional time from the high schools. Where political economy is now taught, industrial history is to take its place. Where political economy is not taught, industrial history is to be treated only in connection with political history and is to supersede some of the less important matter to which attention is now devoted.

Says another. "The plan of work is too difficult for high-school students and the reference books which are given in connection with this paper for high-school reference libraries are too advanced for the grade of students under consideration." This must of course remain somewhat a matter of opinion until it has been settled definitely by experience. However, it is my firm

conviction that any student who is fitted to take up history in a practical and sensible manner can, under proper guidance, grasp the economic principles which the history illustrates, and is in a position to reap the benefits which result from such a study.

Says another, "But we have not the teachers fitted to carry out successfully such a plan." This is a real difficulty and one which constantly confronts those interested in the advancement of historical and economic studies in the secondary schools, and yet I feel that the average teacher in the high school is better prepared to carry out this plan than to attempt a presentation of political economy as a formal science.

To sum up, industrial history as here proposed offers decided advantages for the high-school student over the formal teaching of political economy.

It develops a discriminating judgment, an ability to distinguish the fleeting and the temporary from the permanent forces which determine the character of our civilization. The student has learned to look at the problems critically and to be slow to accept propositions which have not been satisfactorily demonstrated. He has obtained a wide knowledge of economic problems, a knowledge which he can apply to the solution of questions with which he is brought clearly into contact.

But of far greater importance than this he has acquired an attitude of mind, an historical mindedness, which is absolutely essential to the proper performance of his duties as a citizen. The object of the study of economics in the high school should not be primarily to acquire facts. It is not necessary that the student should have economic formulas and principles at his tongue's end. Such catchwords and rules of thumb are apt to prove misleading if they are not supported by some wider knowledge of economic development. It is absolutely essential that students should have such a conception of the evolution of economic society as to produce in them a conservatism, a judicial tolerance, a sense of personal responsibility, and hence a saner and calmer treatment of economic questions. It may not be possible, as many insist, to use history directly in the solution

of our present day questions. Conditions change and a plan which was practicable at an earlier stage of economic development, may be of no value now. But the study of economics in its historical development does give that impartiality of judgment and that respect for the opinions of others, which is a prerequisite to the solution of the troublesome questions now confronting us. Without this, the classes can never be brought together and the vital problems which threaten the very existence of the republic can never be solved.

I submit these suggestions, therefore, with the hope of stimulating the study of economics among young men and women, that the rising generation may approach these great industrial questions with a zeal for the truth and in that spirit of charity and liberality which springs from a broad conception of economic development.

Following is a list of books in economic history which should be found in a high-school reference library. I should be glad to make this list more complete and detailed upon the request of any teacher :

#### ENGLISH AND GENERAL

ASHLEY.—English Industrial History, 2 vols. (Putnams, 1892, 1893.)

CUNNINGHAM.—Growth of English Industry and Commerce. (Cambridge University Press, 1890.) Outlines of English Industrial History. (Macmillan, 1895.)

GIBBINS.—Industrial History of England. (Methuen & Co., London, 1895.) Industrial England: Historical Outlines. (Methuen & Co., 1897.)

THOROLD ROGERS.—Six Centuries of Work and Wages. (Putnams, 1884.) Economic Interpretation of History. (Putnams, 1888.) Industrial and Commercial History of England. (Putnams, 1892.)

HENRY DYER.—Evolution of Industry. (Macmillan, 1895.)

GROSS.—The Gild Merchant, 2 vols. (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1890.)

SCHMOLLER.—The Mercantile System. (Economic Classics Series. Macmillan, 1896.)

RAND.—Economic History Since 1768. (Waterman & Amee, Cambridge, Mass., 1888.)

GARNIER.—History of the English Landed Interest. (Sonnenschein & Co., 1892.)

- TOYNBEE.—Industrial Revolution. (Rivingtons, 1884.)
- BRODRICK.—English Land and English Landlords. (Cassell, Galpin & Co., 1881.)
- HOWELL.—Conflict of Capital and Labor. (Chotto & Windus, London, 1878.)
- FOWLE.—The Poor Law. (Macmillan, 1881.)
- WEBB.—History of Trade Unionism. (Longmans, 1894.)
- JEVONS.—State in Relation to Labor. (Macmillan, 1882.)

## AMERICAN

- BOLLES.—Industrial History of the United States. (Norwich, Conn., 1881.)
- WRIGHT.—Industrial History of the United States. (Flood & Vincent, 1895.)
- LALOR.—Cyclopædia of Political Science. (Rand, McNally & Co., 1882.)  
Reports of the United States Department of Labor.
- BISHOP.—History of Manufactures, 2 vols. (Young & Co., Philadelphia, 1864.)
- WEEDEN.—Economic and Social History of New England. (Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1891.)
- ELY.—Labor Movement in America. (Crowell & Co., 1886.)
- TAUSSIG.—Tariff History of the United States. (Putnams, 1892.)
- WINES.—Punishment and Reformation. (Crowell & Co., 1895.)
- VON HALLE.—Trusts or Industrial Combinations in the United States. (Macmillan, 1895.)
- STIMSON.—Handbook to the Labor Law of the United States. (Scribner's, 1896.)
- INGLE.—Southern Side-lights. (Crowell & Co., 1896.)
- STICKNEY.—The Railroad Problem. (D. D. Merrill, St. Paul, 1891.)
- SMITH.—Emigration and Immigration. (Scribner's, 1890.)
- GILMAN.—Profit Sharing Between Employer and Employé. (Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1889.)
- JUGLAR.—Brief History of Panics. (Putnams, 1893.)

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